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THE CONDOR.

Bulletin of the Cooper Ornithological Club.

A BI-MONTHLY EXPONENT OF CALIFORNIAN ORNITHOLOGY.

Vol. 3. No. 2.

Santa Clara, Cal., March-April, 1901.

\$1.00 a Year

Two Years With Mexican Birds. I. Giraud's Flycatcher.

(*Myiozetetes texensis*).

BY E. H. SKINNER.

[Read before the Northern Division of the Cooper Orn. Club, March 2, 1901.]

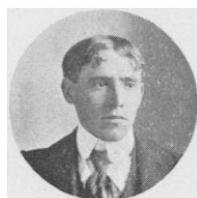
FOR two years I was located near Tapachula, in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. This is the southernmost point of the Mexican republic, and properly speaking in Central America, as it is south of the isthmus of Tehuantepec. Tapachula is in nearly the same longitude as St. Louis and in the same latitude as southern Guatemala and northern Honduras.

Along the coast there is a belt of lowlands averaging thirty miles in width, and back of this belt the mountains rise abruptly to an elevation of ten thousand feet. The lowlands are covered with almost impenetrable tropical jungles, with here and there patches of dreary, treeless, uninhabited plains covered with coarse grass. The heat on these plains is intense and burning, and even in the shady jungle it is suffocating.

All day long there is an almost unbroken silence. The insects can hardly get up energy to chirp. The Turkey and Black Vultures sit motionless on the limbs of some dead tree or circle lazily in the air. The egret roosts in the shade along the sloughs. The Motmot in the jungle sits on a branch and at long intervals utters his *coot, coot* in a

heavy bass, but toward nightfall the chachalaca, the parrots and macaws vie with each other in making the evening hideous with their discordant cries.

Going inland the temperature grows lower as we ascend the foothills, and when we reach an elevation of 5,000 feet the distinctively tropical trees have disappeared, as well as the lowland birds. Here among the semi-tropical forests of oak, palms and countless other trees, is the home of the Quesal (*Pharomacrus mocinno*), the national bird of Guatemala, which pines away and dies if denied its liberty. Among these woods are clearings planted to coffee. This semi-tropical country along the mountain-side is called the coffee belt.



E. H. SKINNER.

Near the summit there are forests of pine, but on the plateau and higher volcanoes the trees are stunted, it being very hot in the daytime and freezing at night. Here we find bluejays, crows, killdeers and other birds of a temperate clime. Having spent most of my time in the coffee belt, I am more familiar with its birds than with those of other sections, so I shall try to describe its most noticeable bird, Giraud's Flycatcher (*Myiozetetes texensis*), which although not the commonest variety, is the most

conspicuous on account of its bright color and lively, noisy ways.

He is never found in the woods but is very abundant on the coffee fincas and pastures, where he sits on some prominent tree ever and anon diving off after a gnat. His cry, which sounds like *cha-tee-a*, with the accent on the middle syllable, (his Mexican name by the way), repeated rapidly several times, can be heard from morning till night all the year round. He has another little note, "weet", which is uttered

or three hundred yards would come to swell the tumult, while at other times the female would leave the nest silently on my approach and not a sign of a flycatcher could be detected while taking the nest.

The nest is a bulky affair measuring on an average nine inches in length, five in height and five inches wide, being well roofed with the opening toward one end, fronting down. This is shown in the accompanying plate. The nest is composed of dry grass, shreds of plan-

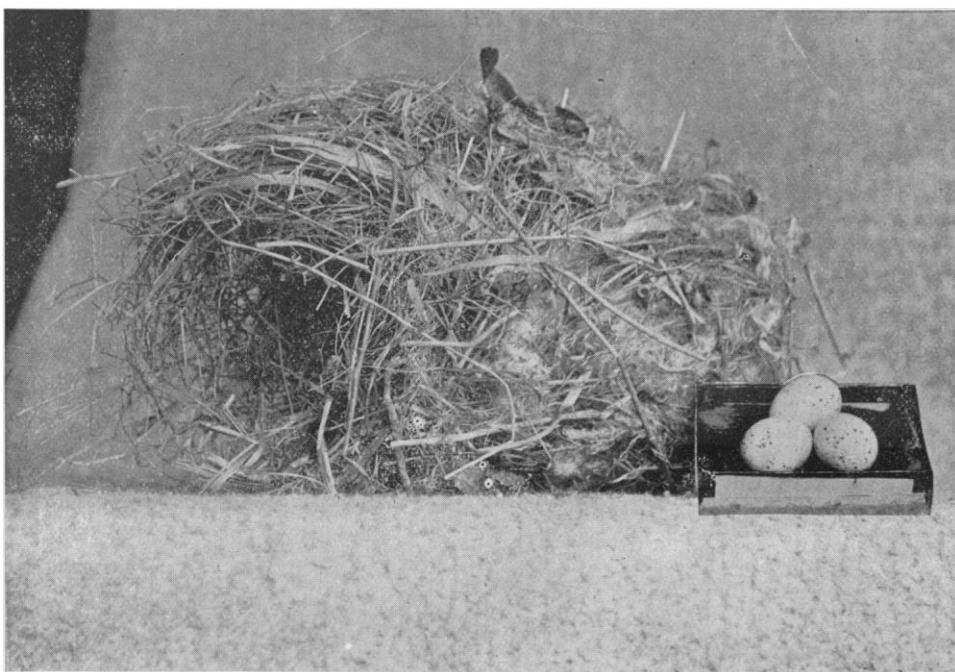


Photo by C. Barlow.

NEST AND EGGS OF GIRAUD'S FLYCATCHER (*Myiozetetes texensis*).
(The opening of the roofed nest at one end, fronting down, is shown).

while he is perched, watching for flies.

These flycatchers are aggressive little fellows. I have seen them chasing turkey buzzards and sparrowhawks which happened to come their way. Sometimes when I have been taking their nests they would make the most terrible disturbance, flying at me and making a great racket. Not only the outraged pair, but as many as eight birds that were within a radius of two

tain and banana leaves, with cottony material interwoven.

Giraud's Flycatcher is not particular in selecting a nesting site, almost any place from which a good view can be obtained, suiting him. I have found nests ranging from four feet to thirty feet in height, in low bushy trees almost but not quite hidden as the birds build on the outside or top of a tree, and in almost bare trees in high and conspicu-

ous situations. I have taken nests from orange trees, ten, twelve and sixteen feet up; from low thorny saplings four, five and eight feet up and many nests from bunches of plantains which generally hang about twelve feet up. I have also seen several among the twigs in the tops of almost branchless trees from twenty to thirty feet up. The birds never build in coffee bushes, and in the cafetal never below the tops of the coffee trees (a height of about ten feet). Nests that are found low down are built in open places.

Giraud's Flycatcher lays usually three or sometimes four eggs. These possess a latitude of variation common to flycatchers' eggs, but may be described as generally resembling the eggs of the kingbird, though perhaps not averaging as heavy in markings. I took my first set of fresh eggs on April 14 and the last on May 4. A set of four fresh eggs was taken on May 10, but it was from a nest from which I had taken a set of four on April 21.

This flycatcher is a friendly little fellow, the clothesline in the back yard being one of his favorite perches, and the trees near the house seemingly his favorite nesting site, as there were six nests within a radius of 100 yards. It is interesting to watch the birds when they have young, and to see them shoot up into the nest from below and presently dive out again.



May in the High Sierras.

DURING the summer-like weather I arrived at the summit of the Central Pacific Railroad, altitude 7,000 feet, the evening of May 10, 1898. There was no snow at the station nor in the large meadow which extends three miles westward, but there were large patches of it on the surrounding peaks and ridges.

The season was unusually early, the willows were partly in leaf and catkin, buttercups, white and blue violets were in flower, while pasturage was good in

the meadow. Frogs (*Hylas*) were peeping, grouse and the Plumed Quail (*Oreortyx p. plumiferus*) were uttering their nuptial notes, butterflies and other insects were numerous, the marmot, chipmunks and other small animals were active but had probably been out of winter quarters only two or three days; as snow was ten inches deep on the second of the month, and did not disappear from the station until the 8th, so Mr. Ott, the agent told me.

The Plumed Partridge (*Oreortyx p. plumiferus*) Blue-fronted Jay (*Cyanocitta s. frontalis*), Cassin's Purple Finch (*Carpodacus cassini*), White-crowned Sparrow, (*Z. leucophrys*), Junco and Arctic Bluebird, (*Sialia arctica*) were common. Additional summer residents in moderate force were noted during the 11th and 12th, namely: Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularia*), Killdeer, (*A. vocifera*), Red-shafted Flicker (*Colaptes c. collaris*), Traill's Flycatcher, (*Empidonax trailli*), Ruby-crowned Wren (*Regulus calendula*) and Western Robin (*Merula m. propinqua*). On the 12th I found a nest of the Mountain Quail or Partridge and one of a Junco, each containing a single egg.

The 13th and 14th were warm but there was a great change in the evening of the latter, when a chilling rain was followed by sleet and snow which continued several days until snow was nearly three feet deep, so I was informed. I went over the meadow again in the afternoon of the 15th; the snow was melting about as fast as it fell, and I found a small flock of Horned Larks which had come to spend the summer. With them was a Western Lark Sparrow (*Chondestes g. strigatus*), a storm-bound migrant, probably an intended summer resident of Truckee Meadows. A Barn Swallow (*Hirundo erythrogaster*) was circling over the meadow in a snow-squall, three cock quails were whistling at the same time and a Western Meadow Lark (*Sturnella m. neglecta*) occasionally sang.

A Lewis's Woodpecker (*Melanerpes*